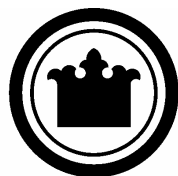


# **Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study**



**King County**

Presented to  
the Metropolitan King County Council  
Labor, Operations & Technology Committee  
by the  
County Auditor's Office

Cheryle A. Broom, King County Auditor  
Elizabeth DuBois, Senior Management Auditor  
Rob McGowan, Senior Management Auditor

Report No. 2003-02  
June 24, 2003

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**Cheryle A. Broom**  
*King County Auditor*

516 Third Avenue, Room W1020  
Seattle, WA 98104-3272

(206) 296-1655  
TTY 296-1024

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** June 24, 2003

**TO:** Metropolitan King County Councilmembers

**FROM:** Cheryle A. Broom, County Auditor

**SUBJECT:** Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study

Attached is the Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up study. The primary objective of this study was to continue the work begun during our 2002 Special Study of King County Jails by following up on our recommendations that DAJD use the auditor's cost model to:

- Analyze opportunities to operate the jails more cost-effectively.
- Develop a better understanding of how non-housing operations are impacted by changes in the jail population.

Our goal was to improve the cost model so that it more accurately reflected operational costs in the department's three largest non-housing areas, Department Administration; Court Detail; and Intake, Transfer and Release (ITR); and to determine their sensitivity to changes in the inmate population (ADP). To accomplish this, we worked closely with Adult Detention staff to analyze the costs and workload of these functions.

### Department Administration

Our conclusions are that Adult Detention has direct control over only a limited portion of its administrative budget, and that only major changes in ADP would significantly affect the department's administrative costs.

### Court Detail and ITR

Our analysis of Court Detail's key workload component, officer transport hours, shows that they are closely related to variations in ADP. This indicates that changes in inmate population levels can be used as a good indicator of potential changes in transport hours. Other external factors beyond Adult Detention's control also affect Court Detail's workload, including the number of judges, courtrooms, and scheduled trials, which drive additional staffing requirements.

Our analysis of ITR's primary workload drivers, bookings and releases, revealed only a slight relationship to ADP levels. Even though the inmate population has grown significantly in recent years, this is largely a result of longer sentences and not an increase in the number of individuals being booked. More likely drivers of ITR's workload are the arrest activities of local law enforcement agencies and broader criminal law and criminal justice policies.

### DAJD Efforts to Improve Cost-Effectiveness

In response to our 2002 report recommendations, DAJD is currently conducting exploratory analysis of potential changes to their staff-inmate ratios at the RJC. Their staff survey of other jails nationwide revealed that Adult Detention's RJC staffing levels are higher than those of other comparable jails. The scenarios currently being explored have the potential to save the department from roughly \$200,000 to \$1.1 million a year, depending on the staffing model chosen and variations in inmate population levels. Adult Detention is still in the process of evaluating the operational impact and cost-effectiveness of these potential changes. In addition, further analysis of the department's residential housing policies will be undertaken by the consultant hired to direct the current Operational Master Plan project.

### Recommendations

As discussed in our 2002 report, neither Court Detail nor ITR has staffing plans that are dynamically tied to variations in their workload. Such plans can not only improve the ability to accurately and efficiently adjust staffing as workload changes, it can also help the department better understand and manage the relative impacts of its workload drivers. We therefore recommend that Adult Detention develop a Court Detail staffing model that includes inmate ADP and transport hours as primary components, and also incorporates the other external factors. For ITR, we recommend that Adult Detention pursue further analysis of the external drivers behind booking and release levels, and develop an appropriate workload-based staffing model.

Finally, we commend Adult Detention's efforts to reevaluate its RJC staffing levels by looking for comparable jails and identifying appropriate staffing benchmarks. We recommend that the department continue this work and integrate its efforts with the ongoing Operational Master Plan project.

### Summary of DAJD's Response

DAJD is in general agreement with this study's findings and recommendations and recognizes the value of our joint efforts to improve the cost allocation model and review jail operations. The department intends to continue its work to increase efficiency in all of its operations and to partner with the council and other county agencies in this effort.

Regarding our specific recommendations, Adult Detention emphasizes that the external factors affecting Court Detail workload are major components, and reiterated that further analysis of their impact is necessary before a staffing model is developed. Audit staff believe this is reasonable and consistent with our recommendation.

With regard to the potential staff-inmate ratio reductions at the RJC, Adult Detention believes that the scenario producing the most savings (\$1.1 million) would not be operationally feasible, and that actual savings would be significantly lower. In addition, the department points out that the scenarios producing higher dollar savings would only occur at inmate populations above what is budgeted or projected in the near future. Audit staff recognize this, and encourage Adult Detention to maximize the savings possible at lower population levels by evaluating relief staffing scenarios that are more flexible.

Metropolitan King County Councilmembers  
June 24, 2003  
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The Auditor's Office sincerely thanks Adult Detention management and staff for their cooperation and collaboration on this project. We hope that this analysis and the development of the cost model have facilitated a shared understanding of the costs of jail operations, and will provide common ground on which to base further policy discussions.

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# Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study

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## Introduction

### **Auditor's Office Conducted Study in 2002**

In 2002, the Auditor's Office completed a special study of the county's adult secure detention jail system, with a focus on identifying and analyzing the major drivers behind the recent growth in adult secure detention costs. The results showed that the cost increases were driven primarily by the need to build additional jail capacity, and by the rising costs of jail health services and county internal service funds. Contributing to the increase were operational and facility design constraints and internal department policies that limited the cost-efficiency of operations and prevented the department from taking advantage of economies of scale associated with the growth in the jail population.

### **Within Constraints, Opportunities May Exist for More Cost- Efficient Staffing**

To better understand how these factors affected jail operations, audit staff developed a cost allocation model that includes the total cost of adult secure detention operations and simulates jail operational policies and practices. Its intended use is to evaluate how changes in the jail population or individual operational policies could impact jail costs. We focused our efforts on the security staff for the residential housing units, the most staff- and cost-intensive areas of jail operations. Our analysis showed that the department operates under some significant constraints that are externally imposed. While our review did not include an evaluation of the *operational effectiveness* of different staffing alternatives, we found that opportunities exist for more *cost-efficient* housing unit staffing. This is true particularly at the RJC where staffing and operational decisions are governed by internal department policy.

### **Scope and Objectives**

This Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study continues our prior work by following up on our recommendation that Adult Detention use our cost model to analyze opportunities to operate the jails more efficiently, as well as to develop a better understanding of how operations and staffing in areas other than residential housing could change as the jail population increases or decreases.

Our goal was to improve the cost model so that it more accurately reflects Adult Detention's operational costs and their sensitivity to changes in inmate population levels. To accomplish this, we worked with department staff to analyze the staffing and workload of the three largest operations outside of residential housing: Department Administration; Court Detail; and Intake, Transfer and Release (ITR).

#### **Objective: Determine if ADP Affects Non-Housing Workload**

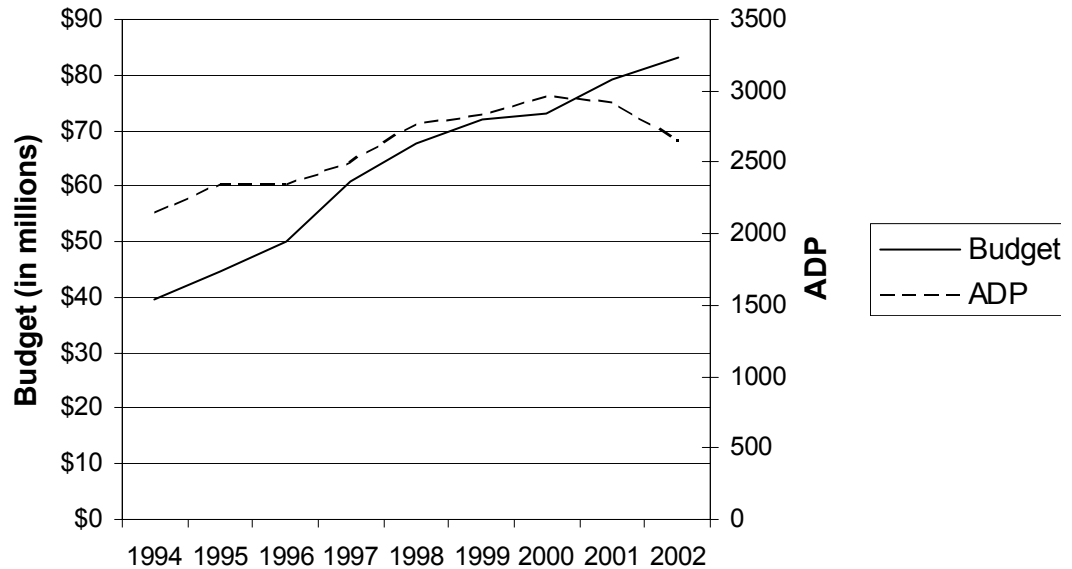
Our objective was to determine if staffing or workload in these areas is sensitive to changes in inmate population levels (as they are in residential housing costs) and, if so, to determine whether thresholds for cost or staffing reductions could be established. We also reviewed Adult Detention's efforts to conduct further analyses of alternative policies and operational practices that could produce cost savings or better use of resources.

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### **ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONS AND COSTS**

The chart below shows how the department's adult secure detention costs have changed in comparison to the average daily population (ADP) of inmates over the last nine years. As it shows, costs and inmate populations have both grown until the last couple of years when ADP began to drop and the budget has continued to grow.

**EXHIBIT A**  
**Secure Detention Budget and ADP**



**Source:** Auditor analysis of ARMS data and DAJD population reports.

As was detailed in our 2002 report, much of the increase in secure detention costs were due to the need to house and provide medical care for a rising number of inmates. This report will discuss factors in non-housing operations that also contributed to the cost increases.

**Non-Housing Operations**

As mentioned, our first study's efforts focused on understanding the cost drivers behind residential security staffing, the most staff- and cost-intensive portion of jail operations, and on determining to what extent these staffing costs are sensitive to changes in the jail population.

To expand on this work, we focused our current efforts on studying the cost and workload drivers behind Adult Detention's three largest operations outside of residential housing: Department Administration; Court Detail; and Intake, Transfer



and Release (ITR). Again, our goal was to determine whether inmate population levels affect their workload and whether Adult Detention could establish appropriate thresholds for cost reductions or increases based on inmate population changes.

### *Department Administration*

Our analysis of Adult Detention's administrative costs shows that only a small percentage of the costs are sensitive to changes in the inmate population, and that the department has direct control over only a portion of its administrative costs. The costs of its daily administrative operations make up less than 15 percent of its overall administrative budget. Internal service funds and intragovernmental transfers make up the rest, and DAJD has little to no control over these costs.

The department's administrative costs can be broken into two broad categories:

- Administrative operations: staff salaries and non-staff costs such as supplies and professional services that are used for day-to-day operations.
- Intragovernmental charges and internal service funds: for services provided by other county agencies and charged to Adult Detention's budget. Some examples are internal service funds for facilities management and information technology, and pass-through charges for Jail Health Services (which is managed by Seattle-King County Department of Public Health).

### **DAJD Has Direct Control Over 13% of Administrative Budget**

The portion of the administration budget that Adult Detention has the most control over is "administrative operations." This is the staff and non-staff costs that support the department-wide administrative functions. Of total administrative costs, administrative operations were approximately \$4.5 million in

2002, or 13 percent of the total Department Administration budget.<sup>1</sup>

This portion of the budget increased by 97 percent between 1994 and 2002, with much of this increase attributable to inflation and to two major changes in the department's operations: the opening of the Regional Justice Center jail (RJC) in 1997 and the merger between juvenile and adult detention in 2000. When the RJC opened, Department Administration staffing increased from 27 to 38.5 FTEs, and the budget increased from \$2.6 million to \$3.5 million. With the 2000 merger of the Departments of Adult Detention and Youth Services, administrative operations FTEs grew to 50.5 and its budget to \$4.1 million. By 2002, both figures grew slightly, with 51 FTEs and a \$4.5 million budget.

**DAJD Has Limited  
Control Over 87  
Percent of  
Administrative Budget**

The remaining 87 percent of the Department Administration budget is largely made up by four components: Jail Health, Construction and Facility Management, Major Maintenance, and Information Technology Services. Because these costs are largely for services provided by other agencies and charged to DAJD, the department has not historically had control over them. For example, pass-throughs to Public Health for Jail Health Services comprised 67 percent of the Department Administration budget in 1994 and 44 percent in 2002. As documented in our 2002 report, costs for Jail Health Services have grown significantly. Between 1994 and 2002, Jail Health Services grew 137 percent.

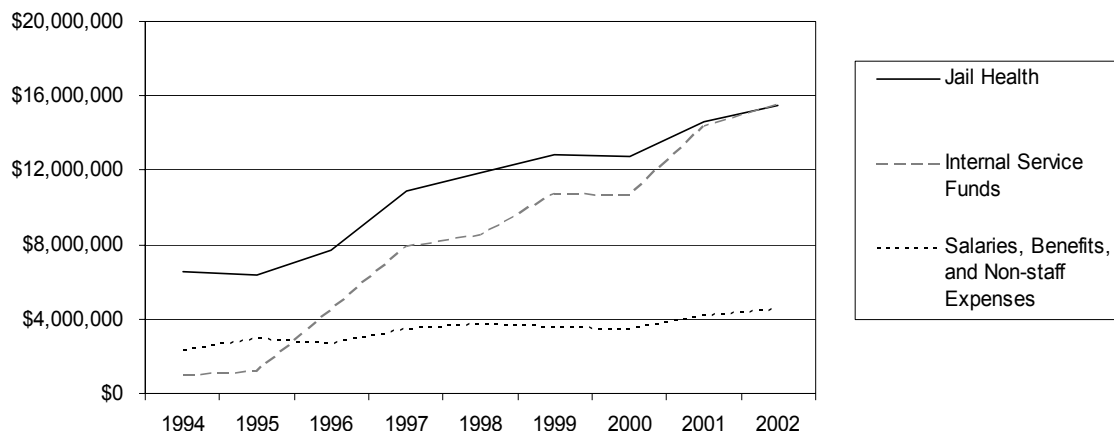
Internal service funds, which are also outside direct DAJD control, have grown even more dramatically than Jail Health. From 1994 to 2002, these accounts grew from less than \$1 million to over \$15 million. The exhibit below illustrates the sharp

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<sup>1</sup> Expenses related to the North Rehabilitation Facility, which was closed in 2002, have been excluded from this analysis.

rise in internal service funds and Jail Health, compared to the slower rise in salaries and benefits and other non-staff costs.<sup>2</sup>

**EXHIBIT B**  
**Department Administration Expenses, 1994-2002**



Note: Figures not adjusted for inflation

SOURCE: ARMS 13<sup>th</sup>-Month Expenditure Reports.

**Closure of RJC  
Required Before  
Administration  
Reductions Could Be  
Made**

As part of our effort to identify thresholds at which staff or other costs would vary according to changes in ADP, DAJD identified three positions within the 48-member Department Administration that could be cut in the future should the inmate population drop sufficiently. However, the “threshold” for these reductions is a high one. According to Adult Detention, workload would not drop significantly enough to cut these positions unless the RJC were fully closed because existing staff are not available to take on additional responsibilities. Similarly, Facilities Management (DFM) staff informed us that reductions in the largest internal service fund, Construction and Facility Management, would not occur unless the RJC closed because the costs are primarily based on actual building-specific costs.

<sup>2</sup> This dramatic increase reflects both actual increases in internal service fund costs and changes in accounting procedures that included adding internal service funds to the Department Administration budget. For example, the Construction and Facility Management fund, which accounts for almost half of the 2002 internal service fund total, was added to the Department Administration budget in 1996. Major Maintenance Reserve, which is an internal service fund unique to DAJD and accounts for 17 percent of the 2002 internal service fund total, was added in 1999.

Neither DAJD nor DFM has models in place capable of simulating discrete changes in workload, and an independent analysis of the workload and cost drivers behind these administrative functions was not possible within the scope of this study. Therefore, we were not able to test these staffing or cost thresholds.

**ADP Affects Court  
Detail's Workload; Less  
Effect on ITR's**

*Court Detail and Intake, Transfer, and Release*

To determine whether Court Detail and ITR workload were sensitive to changes in inmate ADP, we worked with Adult Detention staff to obtain historical workload data and used statistical analysis to understand their relationship to ADP levels. Our analysis revealed a strong relationship between Court Detail's inmate transport hours and changes in ADP, indicating that inmate population levels have a significant effect on workload. In contrast, the booking and release activity of ITR is only slightly related to inmate population levels. This is most likely because ITR's workload is driven by external factors such as law enforcement activity and changes in criminal law and justice policies.

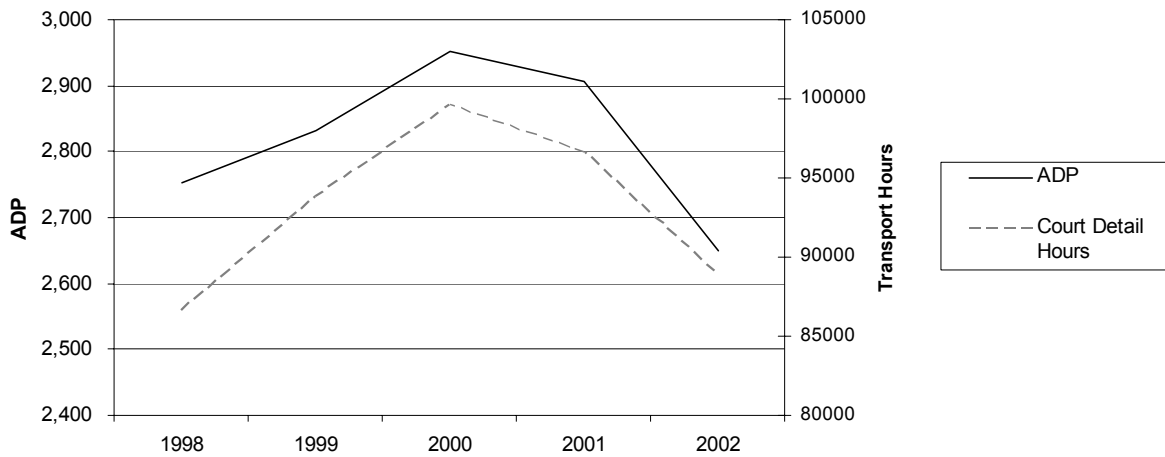
*Court Detail Workload Analysis*

Court Detail manages corrections officers who provide security escorts to inmates for court hearings and trials, and who also transport and supervise some of the inmates requiring off-site medical or psychological care. Between 1994 and 2002, its costs increased 105 percent from \$2.6 million to \$5.3 million, with most of the increase attributable to the opening of the RJC in 1997. At that time, its budget increased 29 percent, from \$3.2 million to \$4.2 million, and staff increased from 49 to 72 FTEs. Court Detail's costs are nearly entirely staff based, with more than 99 percent of its budget made up of corrections officer salaries and benefits.

## Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study

Court Detail workload (as measured by inmate transport hours logged by court detail officers) grew sharply from 1998 to 2000. However, from 2000 to 2002, as ADP declined, Court Detail workload dropped almost to 1998 levels, as shown in Exhibit C.

**EXHIBIT C**  
**ADP and Court Detail Workload**  
**1998 – 2002**



**SOURCE:** ADP from DAJD Big 5 Reports and Court Detail inmate transport data.

As reflected in the exhibit, the relationship between Court Detail workload and ADP is strong. Statistical analysis revealed that almost 80 percent of the changes in Court Detail hours can be explained by changes in ADP, indicating that total inmate population level is a strong driver of Court Detail's inmate transport hours. We also found that variations in the type of inmate (e.g., pre or post sentence felon or misdemeanor) have little relationship to workload changes.

Our interviews show that other factors external to Adult Detention and inmate population also contribute to Court Detail's workload, such as variations in the number of judges and their individual schedules, as well as the number of trials and courtrooms in operation. These factors are beyond the direct control of Adult Detention or Court Detail and can create scheduling challenges

and workload fluctuations. Further study of the influence these factors have on workload would be of benefit to the department.

**Court Detail Staffing  
Plan Not Formally Tied  
to Workload**

As we discussed in our 2002 study, Court Detail does not have a staffing plan that is formally tied to inmate population levels or other workload drivers. Instead, staffing adjustments are made in reaction to workload demands as they occur, and are typically based on estimated staffing needs. For example, although Adult Detention reduced Court Detail staffing in 2003 as part of the department's budget cutbacks, the reduction was not based on a formal analysis of how staff workload had changed. This limits Adult Detention's ability to accurately determine or predict how their staffing needs change in response to changes in workload.

**Recommendation: Tie  
Staffing Plan to  
Workload**

A staffing plan tied to factors influencing workload would provide Court Detail with a more accurate basis for adjusting staffing levels. A well-defined plan can not only improve the department's ability to efficiently and accurately adjust staffing as workload increases or decreases, but it can also help the department better understand and manage the relative impacts of different drivers on workload. We are, therefore, recommending that Adult Detention develop a Court Detail staffing model that includes inmate transport hours and ADP as primary components, and also takes into account the other externally driven workload factors.

*Intake, Transfer, and Release Workload Analysis*

The majority of ITR staff are corrections officers who are responsible for booking inmates into jail and coordinating intake and release procedures. Staff also manage jail transfers, court commitment paperwork, and jail release schedules. Similar to Court Detail, ITR's costs are nearly entirely staff-based, with more than 95 percent of its budget made up of corrections officer salaries and benefits.

## Adult Detention Jail Costs Follow-up Study

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Between 1994 and 2002 ITR costs increased 60 percent from \$5 million to \$8.6 million, with most of the increase attributable to the opening of the RJC in 1997. At that time, its budget increased 38 percent, from \$5.2 million to \$7.1 million, and staff increased from 74 to 130 FTEs. In recent years, however, booking operations at the RJC have been substantially scaled back. The first change occurred in May 2000, when the RJC's nighttime booking shift was closed. A second major reduction occurred in December 2002 when Adult Detention further reduced RJC booking hours down to one extended daytime shift. These changes resulted in an estimated reduction of 26 FTEs.

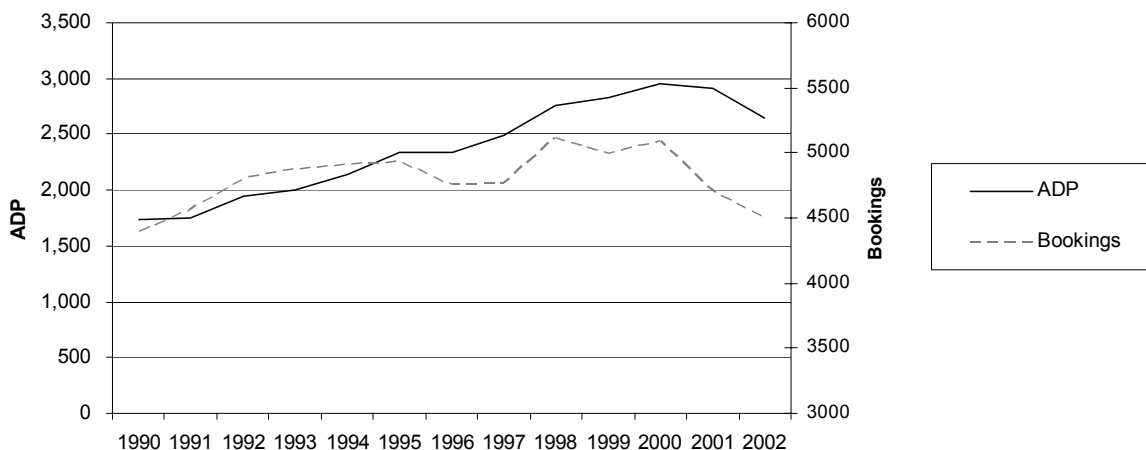
### **ADP Has Limited Impact on ITR Workload**

In contrast to Court Detail, the number of bookings and releases handled by ITR has remained relatively stable and is only somewhat related to changes in the inmate population. As illustrated in the chart below, inmate ADP has increased fairly consistently over the last decade while booking levels have fluctuated. Overall, between 1990 and 2002 ADP increased by 53 percent, largely due to increases in inmates' average length of stay, while bookings increased only 2.6 percent. Current booking volumes have dropped to 1991 levels.

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**EXHIBIT D**  
**Average Daily Inmate Population and Average Bookings, 1990 - 2002**

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**SOURCE:** DAJD Population and Booking Reports

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Our regression analysis indicates a somewhat weak relationship between inmate population and ITR booking activity, with ADP variations explaining only about 25 percent of the change in bookings. A possible explanation for why the relationship is weak is that the number of ITR bookings is most likely driven by the arrest activities of local law enforcement agencies, and other external factors such as changes in criminal law and criminal justice policy.

**ITR Lacks a Formal  
Workload-Based  
Staffing Plan**

As with Court Detail, ITR also lacks a staffing plan that is formally based on workload levels, which limits Adult Detention's ability to determine how staffing requirements have changed or will in the future. Although Adult Detention has no control over the number of bookings and releases, a workload-based staffing plan could improve the department's ability to plan its staffing needs and more accurately adjust staff levels as its workload varies.

Based on our workload analysis, we conclude that Adult Detention can use inmate ADP as a predictor of Court Detail transport hours, which are a primary component of staff workload. However, ADP is only somewhat related to ITR workload and should not be used alone as a basis for adjusting staffing levels. More analysis is needed of the external drivers behind bookings and releases in order to determine the key workload drivers and to develop an appropriate workload-based staffing model for ITR.

In addition, workload in both Court Detail and ITR has changed substantially in recent years. However, Adult Detention does not have staffing models in place that enable it to efficiently and accurately determine how its staffing needs vary with workload changes, or to fully understand the reasons behind its changing workload.



### **Health-Related Jail Expenditures**

In our 2002 study we focused our analysis of medical costs solely on Jail Health, which is operated by the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. However, as noted in that report, we had concerns about the fact that Jail Health policies and practices create staffing costs for Adult Detention. For example, Jail Health staff determine when an inmate needs medical care that must be provided by practitioners outside of the jail. Because all inmates being transported outside of the jail must be guarded, Jail Health's decisions directly drive the staffing costs of corrections officers responsible for guarding inmates in transit. Although Adult Detention has discretionary control over the staffing levels needed to supervise inmates requiring medical or mental health care, it does not have control over if and when staffing is needed.

To better understand the extent of these medical costs, we researched Adult Detention's staffing requirements for inmate guarding at Harborview hospital and other medical facilities, and for guarding inmates determined by Jail Health to need mental health observation (e.g., suicide watch).

### **Small Increase in Medically Related Officer Guarding**

Our analysis of staffing between 1999 and 2002 shows that the number of corrections officers required to guard inmates requiring medical-related care has increased slightly. As the table below shows, officer guarding at Harborview has increased by about two FTEs, and guarding for inmates requiring suicide watch within the jail has declined slightly. Court Detail transports to Harborview and other medical facilities have increased slightly.

**EXHIBIT E**  
**Medical-Related Guard FTEs Provided Outside Jail Health**

Type	1999	2002
Harborview Guarding*	21.2	23.8
Other Medical Transport**	0.0	0.4
Mental Health Guarding***	24.3	22.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>46.9</b>

\* Housing and ITR staff. Includes relief posts in ITR and Court Detail.

\*\*Court Detail staff.

\*\*\*Includes suicide watch and permanent posts on KCCF 7 South.

**SOURCE:** DAJD staffing reports and auditor analysis of Court Detail workload.

**Staffing Scenario Analysis**

**Adult Detention Is Re-evaluating Its RJC Staffing Levels**

In response to our 2000 report's recommendation that DAJD use the cost model to identify operational efficiencies, department staff are currently performing preliminary analysis of potential changes to the staff-inmate ratios at the RJC. Adult Detention conducted an informal survey of other large jails around the country and identified 10 that were judged to be comparable in terms of their operational model. Department staff analysis of these other "benchmark" jails showed that while some have staffing levels higher than the RJC's, others appear to operate at relatively lower levels. This observation, along with current budget circumstances, prompted Adult Detention to evaluate reductions in their staff-inmate ratios.

**Operational Savings Are Possible, But Will Vary With Inmate Population Levels and Staffing Models**

Our review of Adult Detention's exploratory staffing scenarios shows that they have the potential to save the department from roughly \$200,000 to \$1.1 million a year. These savings estimates depend on variations in inmate population levels (the more inmates, the greater the savings) and on the particular staffing models. Adult Detention and the executive's budget office are in the process of evaluating these scenarios in light of their potential impact on operations and cost-effectiveness. In addition, further analysis of the department's residential housing

policies will be undertaken within the scope of the current Operational Master Plan project.

**Summary of Findings and Recommendations**

As we noted in our 2002 jail cost study, Adult Detention does not have formal staffing models in place for Court Detail and ITR operations that are dynamically tied to workload indicators or guidelines. The staffing required for these functions is not as directly related to inmate population levels as that of residential housing security, which makes the development of workload-based staffing models more complex.

Our current analysis shows that a primary component of Court Detail workload, inmate transport hours, is closely related to changes in total inmate population. Therefore, we recommend that Adult Detention develop a Court Detail staffing model that includes inmate ADP and transport hours as primary components, and conduct the research necessary to incorporate the relative impact of the other external workload factors.

Variations in inmate ADP are only somewhat related to the number of bookings and releases managed by ITR, indicating that ADP should not be used as the primary indicator of changes in ITR workload. We recommend that Adult Detention work with local law enforcement agencies to identify the other drivers behind ITR's workload and to develop a staffing model based on ADP and these other factors.

Finally, we commend Adult Detention's efforts to reevaluate its RJC staffing levels by surveying comparable jails and identifying appropriate staffing benchmarks. We recommend that the department continue its work to identify more cost-effective staffing approaches, and continue to integrate its efforts with the ongoing Operational Master Plan project.

**Summary of DAJD's Response**

DAJD is in general agreement with this study's findings and recommendations and recognizes the value of our joint efforts to improve the cost allocation model and review jail operations. The department intends to continue its work to increase efficiency in all of its operations and to partner with the council and other county agencies in this effort.

**DAJD Concurs With  
Recommendations and  
Clarifies Issues**

Regarding our specific recommendations, Adult Detention emphasizes that the external factors affecting Court Detail workload are major components, and reiterated that further analysis of their impact is necessary before a staffing model is developed. Audit staff believe this is reasonable and consistent with our recommendation.

With regard to the potential staff-inmate ratio reductions at the RJC, Adult Detention believes that the scenario producing the most savings (\$1.1 million) would not be operationally feasible, and that actual savings would be significantly lower. In addition, the department points out that the scenarios producing higher dollar savings would only occur at inmate populations above what is budgeted or projected in the near future. Audit staff recognize this, and encourage Adult Detention to maximize the savings possible at lower population levels by evaluating relief staffing scenarios that are more flexible.

The Auditor's Office sincerely thanks Adult Detention management and staff for their cooperation and collaboration on this project. We hope that this analysis and the development of the cost model have facilitated a shared understanding of the costs of jail operations, and will provide common ground on which to base further policy discussions.